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ABSTRACT

Research was conducted to assess young preschoolers' knowledge of emotion and to explore the relation between children's understanding of emotion and their prosocial behavior. This discussion briefly describes measures devised to investigate knowledge of emotion, and outlines findings. Also discussed are relations between knowledge of emotion and social competence, as rated by teacher and peers. In addition, the discussion covers research in progress that investigates relations between knowledge of emotion and socialization variables, such as the mother's attitudes about emotionality, her expressed emotions, and her discussion of emotion with the child. (RH)

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Knowledge About Emotions: Relations with Socialization and Social Behavior

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Running Head: CORRELATES OF EMOTION KNOWLEDGE IN YOUNG CHILDREN

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Knowledge About Emotions: Relations with Socialization and Social Behavior

Children's understanding of emotion is a vital component their social cognition. Such understanding is drawn upon frequently in the course of social interaction; given the salience of emotions, emotion knowledge is likely to develop very early. Because of this I have become involved in a program of research to begin to fill certain gaps that I perceived in the study very young children's comprehension of emotion, and that comprehension's relation to social behavior and socialization variables.

The model I would like to put forward for the link between emotion knowledge and social-emotional development is as follows: Contributing factors to emotion knowledge can be intrapersonal, as in the emotions the child expresses, or interpersonal, as in various modes of emotion socialization. Emotion knowledge, in turn, may contribute to social competence, as assessed in a variety of ways.

Given this model, my initial aims were to clarify what I suspected was young preschoolers' substantial emotion knowledge, and to dig deeper into the then empirically unimpressive relation between understanding of emotion and prosocial behavior. To appropriately measure these capacities in very young children, I framed dependent

measures within the children's normal environment, acknowledging their natural reliance on adults and lack of verbal proficiency. Puppets are used in my emotion knowledge measures to maximize the children's engagement and responsiveness.

In my talk today, I want to first briefly describe the measures that I have developed, and to outline current findings regarding the following segments of the model: (1) young preschoolers' emotion knowledge; and (2) the relation of these abilities to prosocial behaviors, and to children's own expression of emotions. For these analyses I combined two samples, one of which was reported on in 1986 in Child Development, and the other as yet unpublished (total N = 68). The subjects' average age was 39-43 months.

I will spend more time discussing the relations between emotion knowledge and more broadly defined social competence, as rated by teacher and peers. Last, I will describe research currently in progress, investigating the relations between emotion knowledge and socialization variables, such as the mother's attitudes about emotionality, her own expressed emotions, and discussion of emotion with the child. These results are based on unpublished data from my second, more recent sample (N = 48).

In the measure of emotion knowledge which I have used, facial expressions of happiness, sadness, anger, and fear are drawn on flannel; in the segment tapping identification of emotional expressions, children are asked to verbally and non-verbally demonstrate comprehension of these facial expressions. Next, two types of emotional situations are enacted: (1) unequivocal situations in which everyone would feel the same way (e.g., happiness at receiving an ice cream cone); and (2) equivocal situations, where a child could reasonably feel one of two emotions, such as fear or happiness to meet a new dog, happiness or sadness to come to preschool, happiness or anger to eat a certain food. The puppeteer emits standard facial and vocal cues of emotion, to add to the ecological validity of the measure. The child is asked to affix the correct face on the puppet, via a velcro tab, to depict how the puppet feels. Thus, to recapitulate, we have three measures of emotion knowledge: (1) identification of expressions; (2) comprehension of unequivocal situations; and (3) comprehension of equivocal situations.

Research using this measure suggests that young preschoolers were able to identify emotion expressions, particularly when using receptive language. Unequivocal emotion situations were identified quite early, as well,

suggesting the existence of social scripts. Happy situations were easier to comprehend than negative situations, though only fear was difficult to comprehend through the whole age period. Equivocal situations were responded to correctly at a greater than chance level, suggesting that when these tasks are appropriately measured, preschoolers are becoming capable of them. Nevertheless, these young children were clearly grappling with the self/other inference inherent in the equivocal situations. For example, children often said, while affixing the proper face, "But I would not like to see that dog" or "But I hate oatmeal!", even going so far as to lecture the puppet as to the many disagreeable properties of oatmeal.

Now let us look at intrapersonal contributions to emotion knowledge. Regarding children's enduring emotions, it has been postulated that children showing relatively more positive emotions would be more able to learn about emotions (not being distracted by their own distress). In my research, subjects' emotions were naturalistically observed during free play. Percentage of total emotions expressed as happiness was in fact positively related to all three measures of emotion knowledge. Percentage of sadness, anger, and hurt displays were negatively related to emotion knowledge. The relative profile, as opposed to the absolute

rate, of each emotion, appears to be important. Further, children's overall rate of emotional displays was related to identification of emotional expressions and unequivocal situation knowledge, suggesting that experience with one's own emotions promotes emotion knowledge. See Table 1.

Regarding the social concomitants of emotion knowledge in the model, many theories have predicted a relation between emotion knowledge and prosocial behavior, but the correlations have often been disappointing. Using observational paradigms and the puppet measure of emotion knowledge, significant positive correlations have been obtained between measures of emotion knowledge and spontaneous prosocial behaviors in response to peers' and adult's emotion displays. Those children who understood emotions in a more sophisticated manner (particularly in equivocal situations) also behaved in a more prosocial manner in response to others' emotions.[1] See Table 2.

Thus, such abilities do appear to play a role in specific social interaction where emotion knowledge could be important (i.e., a situation where another person's emotion needs to be understood). Perhaps the special salience of emotion in social interchange would suggest that emotion knowledge would also be related to more global indices of social-emotional competence. To answer this question,

preschool teachers completed the Baumrind Q-Sort of Preschool Behavior for each child. Peers also performed sociometric ratings of each child (these were modified presentations of Asher's pictorial peer rating measure designed for preschoolers).

Findings indicate that abilities to identify emotional expressions and to comprehend unequivocal emotion situations were related to teacher-perceived social qualities of dominance, purposefulness, and independence. In rating a child high on the dominance scale of the Baumrind Q-Sort, teachers basically endorse the child as a planful leader with a "mind of their own". Similarly, the Baumrind purposeful scale describes the confident, self-starting child, and the independent scale describes children high in originality and individualism. Thus, children who know what they want to do, and who can persuade others to follow suit, also tended to be those who understood emotions. One could envision that knowledge of one's own and others' emotions could free one up to be confident, a "take-charge" sort of person, and, interestingly, persuasive in social situations. See Table 3.

One of the strongest predictors of children's peer status was an aggregate of the three measures of emotion

knowledge. Children whom others like happened to be those who better understood emotions.

Emotion knowledge was more strongly related to peer status than even the child's own enduring emotions; something about the judgments of likability which peers are making, even at this early age, is tapping into the child's relative ability to decipher those salient emotional cues in the environment.

The processes by which understanding of others' emotions during social interactions affect young children's responses should be more finely investigated, perhaps using an analogue methodology like that Kenneth Dodge uses in his study of social cognition and social behavior. Continuing analyses will be performed to even more firmly substantiate the relation between these very young children's understanding of emotion and others' judgments of their competent social behavior.

Thus these abilities to understand emotion appeared important in supporting the emission of socially competent behavior. Support for the intrapersonal contributors was also found.

Let us turn to interpersonal contributors to emotion knowledge. What socialization variables appear to be related to this vital emotion knowledge? Mothers' child-

rearing attitudes about discipline and expression of emotions could be seen as potentially very powerful. For example, a mother who felt uncomfortable expressing many strongly-felt emotions around her child, and intentionally discouraged similar open display by the child, might be unwittingly limiting many experiences where emotion knowledge might develop. Similarly, mothers who show relatively many negative emotions might engender defensive reactions in children, which again hamper development of emotion knowledge. Conversely, mothers who value rational, inductive modes of discipline, and who actually do discuss emotions with their child, could be seen as intentionally socialize greater knowledge of emotional situations.

In order to begin to test these possibilities, the following measures have been administered to mothers. First, mothers have performed the Block Parenting Practices Q-Sort. In the rational disclipline scale of the Block Q-sort, mothers endorse talking over and reasoning through problems. In the emotion expression scale, they report comforting a distressed child, showing much affection and warm intimate feelings, and being able to show anger where appropriate. On the control throu guilt induction and anxiety scales, on the other hand, mothers endorse making their children ashamed for misdeeds or grateful for parental

sacrifice, and that "one way or the other, you will be punished for your misbehavior".

Mothers have also completed a downward revision of Saarni's PACES, a questionnaire which assesses the extent to which parents try influence their children to modulate/ suppress their emotional expression. Thus, items reflect mild to fairly stringent reactions to common, but potentially problematic, emotion displays of children. They might include disappointment at receiving an inappropriate gift, or staring with obvious horror at a handicapped person.

Last, mothers have been videotaped talking with their children about pictures of infants displaying peak expressions of Izard's eight discrete emotions. The analysis of this detailed data is only at a gross level at this time: the major measure reported on here is the number of mothers' utterances which include emotion words, an indication of the mothers' propensity to discuss emotions with their child. On the average, mothers use slightly more than one emotion term per picture.

Hierarchial regression equations were created to test hypotheses about socialization of emotion situation knowledge, both unequivocal and equivocal. In each, maternal socialization factors were entered after ability to

identify emotion expressions was partialled out, thus testing the importance of socialization factors over and above perceptual ability to label emotion expressions. Next, positive socialization factors (e.g., Block emotion expression and rational scales, amount of verbalization about emotions in baby picture task) were entered in one step, and last, negative socialization factors were entered (e.g., Block control through guilt induction and control through anxiety scales and the Saarni PACES).

These analyses indicate that, even with ability to label expressions partialled out, rational approaches to child-rearing were positively weighted predictors of knowledge of unequivocal and equivocal emotion situations. These especially include valuing expression of emotion (i.e., feeling comfortable with expressing a variety of emotions, especially positive ones, with one's child). Saarni's PACES was a strong negative predictor in both equations. Discussion of emotions, as indexed by total utterances including emotion terms, was related to understanding of unequivocal situations. See Table 4.

Simple correlation analyses of infant pictures task data also indicate that two maternal techniques were related to knowledge of unequvocal emotion situations. These are qualifying emotion terms (e.g., "she looks so very happy")

and questioning or repeating their children's utterances Repeating the child's utterances is a confirmation, a way of saying "yes, you are correct", whereas questioning seems to get the children to come up with an interpretation of a situation explaining the baby's emotion. Qualifiers could be seen as "honing the edge" of emotion knowledge, adding even more detail to situational knowledge. Self-reported frequency of mothers' negative emotions was negatively related to the child's emotion knowledge.

Thus children who are more advanced in their emotion knowledge in the early to middle preschool period tend to have mothers who: (1) support the child's expression of emotion; (2) are committed to rational discussions of these emotions); and (3) freely express emotions (mostly positive). In this age range, pressuring the child to suppress/inhibit emotional expression appears to hamper emotion knowledge.

Much remains to be done. This line of research investigating the model I have outlined here is, however, continuing to yield fruitful results. Contextualized measurements of emotion knowledge, interpersonal and intrapersonal contributors to emotion knowledge, and social behaviors are bringing more understanding of emotion knowledge and emotional development.

Table 1

Correlations of Emotion Knowledge with Expressed Emotions

	Labeling Expressions	Unequivocal Situations	Equivocal Situations
Happy %	.46***	.44***	.43***
Sad %	-.14	-.28*	-.16
Angry %	-.36**	-.29*	-.33**
Hurt %	-.33**	-.25*	-.32**
Happy Rate	.47***	.36**	.33**
Sad Rate	-.03	-.23*	-.12
Angry Rate	.00	-.02	-.08
Hurt Rate	-.11	-.07	-.14
Overall Emotionality	.36**	.25*	.20

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 2

Correlations of Emotion Knowledge and Prosocial Behavior

	Labeling Expressions	Unequivocal Situations	Equivocal Situations
Prosocial With Peers	.38**	.34**	.50***
Prosocial To Adult	.14	.38**	.33*

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 3

Correlations of Emotion Knowledge and Social Competence

	Labeling Expressions	Unequivocal Situations	Equivocal Situations
Sociometric Rating	.16	.35*	.37*
Baumrind Aggregate[a]	.36*	.36*	.11

[a] Aggregate = sum of dominance, purposefulness, and independence Baumrind Q-Sort scales.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 4

Regression Analyses: Emotion Situation Comprehension Predicted by Socialization Factors

Multiple R	Equation F	Step F	Variable Entered	Beta
Criterion Variable: Unequivocal Situation Knowledge				
1 .624	31.96 ***	31.96 ***	Labeling	.62
2			Discussion	.25
			Rational	.27
.736	13.92 ***	5.21 **	Expressive	.17
3			Control/ Guilt	-.15
			Control/ Anxiety	-.11
.807	11.73 ***	4.58 **	PACES	-.32
Criterion Variable: Equivocal Situation Knowledge				
1 .220	2.58	2.58	Labeling	.22
2 .494	7.89 ***	12.61 ***	Expressive	.37
3			Control/ Guilt	-.25
			Control/ Anxiety	-.35
.648	6.65 ***	4.65 **	PACES	-.48

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Footnote

[1] Many interesting findings regarding prosocial response to adult distress, and its relation to emotion knowledge, can be found in a shortened revision of the second author's undergraduate thesis. Copies may be requested from the first author.